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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

ROBT. W. FURNAS,

GOVERNOR OF NEBRASKA

DELIVERED AT THE

SIXTH SESSION OF THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF

NEBRASKA ASSEMBLED IN JOINT CONVENTION

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GOVERNOR'S INAUGURAL.

Gentlemen of the Senate and House of Representatives:

I have, by the popular expression of the people, to the chief magistracy of this young commonwealth. I have taken the prescribed oath, and am now about to enter upon the important duties of the office. Trusting that I fully appreciate the responsibilities of the position, my aim shall be to faithfully serve a people who have so generously exhibited the general trust. Having an abiding faith in the future growth and development of the State, no duty will be left unperformed, on my part, that will in the least tend to its prosperity, advancement and honorable position with other States of the Union.

Not yet having taken possession of the archives, I have had no opportunity other than that enjoyed by citizens in common of obtaining information pertaining thereto. My predecessor has placed before you the reports of the heads of the several departments, together with his message, containing such information and recommendations as the Constitution requires and as is customary at the commencing of the Legislative Assembly. To those reports your attention has already been invited. It is unnecessary, expected, and this message does not embrace upon governmental duties the recommendations which should emanate at least the outlines of policy recommended, nor do the functions of this office require such. The only guide I have here, will be to administer the affairs of state to the best interests of the people, and see that the exact

ments of the law-making power are faithfully executed. While elected by one of the political organizations of the day, on presentation of principles peculiar thereto, my duty now is to the whole people, regardless of political associations or geographical localities. While there are honest differences as to political systems, principles and affiliations, the government itself being of the people, should be for the people, and administered upon corresponding principles.

Our surroundings and the circumstances under which we act are quite different in many respects from those of the older and more established States. Here we are having opened the foundations than elsewhere, for those who are to come after us. The constantly growing and diversified wants of an intelligent and enterprising people are to be considered and legislated upon. We are compelled, therefore, to a much greater extent, to meet contingencies and demands as they arise and present themselves for consideration, rather than to have positive rules as to what will best contribute to the happiness and welfare of a constituency thus surrounded.

It is not my intention, nor would I presume on your intelligence and ability as legislators, by attempting to argue matters in detail to which I may feel inclined to call your attention. I accept these returns, leaving either constitution or power wanting in the premises.

No Legislature ever met or acted, with or as a State, more encouraged with or by important matters pertaining thereto for careful, conservative and careful consideration, than the present. Our unparalleled prosperity and progress in all matters should incite every public mind and actuate effort for higher attainments.

MILITARY.

It is a commendable official truth to say, that a general diffusion of knowledge among the people is essential to the preser-

vation of liberty and the maintenance of Republican institutions. Education, therefore, being the true foundation to all greatness and prosperity—the progressive disposition heretofore and at present manifested by our people; the munificent endowments provided and placed at our disposal, render this feature of our State affairs second to none other. In our country, more than in older lands, learned and well informed men are needed. In consequence of its vastness, the resources of our State are but just beginning to be developed. We require scientific men and women to discover and utilize, and thus unfold our boundless wealth and means of support. We must have those of the highest order of native talent and culture attainable, to lead and guide our industry in the great work of development.

We already have more organized schools, more school-houses erected, and of superior character; more money invested in buildings, books and apparatus, than ever before by any State of our age. We have a land endowment embracing nearly, or quite, one eighteenth of the entire public domain of the State. The value of local buildings range from one thousand to two hundred thousand dollars each.

The entire educational system of the State should be such as to make every branch or feature intimately and organically related, as integral parts, each essential to its completion and perfect work. The Common school should form the base, followed by the High, Normal and Academic schools, in connection with the University. The Normal school, although differing somewhat in its general characteristics, arranges favorably for the Common and other schools, and guarantees a careful system of imparting knowledge and governing educational organizations, should nevertheless, occupy the subordinate relation in the general system. The State University has never been, and the expectations of sanguine friends, and its requirement that it should be maintained, and to such a condition of efficiency as to entitle it to the prosperities

land grant likely to be given by Congress, at its present session, to all colleges. The pending bill provides for five hundred thousand acres to each agricultural college. The present University income is sufficient.

The Normal school requires some further aid. A wise economy dictates the early completion of the building now under way. The building authorities have kept themselves within the bounds of the appropriation made by law for that purpose. There is a deficiency in funds realized, however, owing to a failure to collecting taxes. Relief should be afforded; the building completed, furnished, and, if possible, at least a foundation laid for a library, and provisions made for the purchase of philosophical and chemical apparatus. The corps of teachers should be sufficient to progress with the work imperatively needed. With judicious management of its lands and other matters, this institution may soon be made self sustaining. In fact I am of the opinion that our whole educational system, from Common school to University, can, with careful and careful management, be made entirely self-sustaining in a State and, within a very few years.

Too frequent changes of statutes or laws, I am aware, are bad, as a rule, productive of the greatest good. It is thought that our existing laws on the subject of education can be so remodeled or amended as to meet the emergency, without complicating or interfering with its present operations.

The present school law, particularly as applicable to Common schools, needs to be thoroughly revised and amended in many particulars. The subject of various amendments has been carefully considered and digested by both State and local educational organizations, and suggestions agreed upon will be laid before the Legislature

AGRICULTURE.

One of the first and most important duties of a legislator should be to stimulate and foster the great wealth-producing, industries of a State. The area of country embraced within the geographical limits of our State being peculiarly and almost exclusively of an agricultural character, together with the fact that we "occupy the key-stone place in that gigantic trans-Missouri arch of agriculture;" the settled national axiom that "Nations, States, individuals and civilization prosper as agriculture thrives," or recede as it languishes, renders this branch of industry, in a great measure, the foundation of that prosperity in store for us. Hence an over degree of fostering care and attention cannot be given this all important subject. The State, county and other organizations of this character have already accomplished much in the right direction, and will do still more with such a continuance of legislative and local assistance.

TREE EXEMPTIONS.

The several laws on our statute books, exempting from taxation for reason of tree planting, were apparently enacted, and have served a most admirable purpose. I am satisfied, however, that they have become oppressive, and are working hardships in very many instances. By this I do not by any means wish to be understood as advocating or even countenancing in a policy in any way tending to discourage tree-planting in our prairie region. On the contrary I regard it of vital importance. I am convinced a more efficient plan can be inaugurated at very much less expense, and conflicting with a desired uniform system of taxation avoided. Careful investigation of this subject warrants the assertion that existing tree exemption laws have cost the State not less than two hundred thousand dollars the past year. The repeal of all these

laws and the passage of a new one creating a Tree Commissioner or a State Forester, and requiring all State and county agricultural organizations to pay a liberal per cent of the respective amounts they receive from the public treasuries, as premiums, would accomplish more than the present laws, and at not a tithe of the expense. Such a course on your part, aided by the pending legislation on the part of Congress, would abundantly supply our treeless prairies.

The details of the matter presented for your consideration I will be pleased to communicate to your committees on agriculture.

REVENUE.

The question of revenue is one of vital importance to a State. It is but just, in a free government like ours, where all partake equally in its protection and privileges, that sustaining burthens should be borne proportionately, with means and ability to contribute. Uniform valuation and assessment of all property at its actual present cash value, with prompt payment, is the only true system of taxation — is alone just and equitable, can alone lighten the burthen and render satisfaction. Taxes, as now assessed and collected in our State, are unjust and actually oppressive. With proper distribution they would not be felt. The simple fact that nearly three hundred thousand dollars delinquent State taxes are uncollected, and in some counties more than that of a local character, is evidence that our existing revenue laws are either inadequate or improperly administered. There is a diversity of opinion among even legal minds as to where the difficulty really is, or how a practical remedy can be obtained. This important subject will require careful consideration on your part, and in so doing you should not be unmindful of the surroundings of your constituency — the existing stringency in monetary affairs, the present meagre prices of products, and the almost universal condition of trade.

COLLECTION LAWS.

Next in importance and intimately connected with the question of revenue, stand the collection laws. A sound policy will provide that labor and capital move hand in hand; neither can thrive without the aid of the other. The latter, while possessing ability at all times to care for itself, is nevertheless cautious, requiring encouragement. The former, helpless of itself, but benefitted by the presence and use of the latter, should have every possible safeguard and protection thrown about it. To these ends it will be wisdom on your part to inquire as to the character and tendency of our collection, exemption, stay, and other kindred laws as they exist. Do they operate to keep capital from among us, and against the true interests of those for whose benefit they were enacted, or otherwise, are important questions for you to decide upon. In considering these intricate questions great caution should be exercised, and due consideration of all circumstances, and objects to be attained, to the end that the actual necessities and true interests of the masses be not unduly intermeddled upon, nor a desired healthy status of capital retarded. In the matter of revenue and collection laws, let the effort and object be to relieve the people and develop the State.

INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS.

With the present and constantly increasing necessities of the State, you will be required to solve many difficult problems—perhaps none more important than those generally understood as works of internal improvement—particularly railroads. There is nothing more conducive to rapid, permanent and healthy development, or advancement in all respects, than this class of improvements. They open and populate the country. We cannot dispense with them, because they inaugurate, manage and perfect great enterprises, in which we are all directly interested. No

more important duty devolves upon you than to give every possible and legitimate encouragement in that direction. An equally important duty, however, will be to guard well the natural tendency of monopolies to encroach upon the rights and interests of the people, who aid and encourage with both influence and purse. Mutual efforts and labors should be followed with mutual accommodations and benefits. Wholesome, judicious, impartial legislation, tending to serve the public good, should not be lost sight of during your labors.

[illegible]

In connection with the developing agencies referred to, you should consider the question of local and other bonds. These evidences of indebtedness, issued under sanction of proper legal regulations, ought to command par value. The people, appreciating the importance of improvements and commercial facilities, and possessed of the true spirit of enterprise, at all times respond liberally, and have the ability and determination to pay promptly both principal and interest as stipulated. Yet our bonds, when thrown into the markets, often realize not over three-fourths their actual value. Under these circumstances the tax-payers pay one-fourth more than would otherwise be required of them. If by legislative action you can provide against this evil, you will have performed an important duty to your constituents.

I recommend for your consideration, as a means by which the value of our bonds may be enhanced, a "Registration Law," now in force in some of our sister States, and which it is believed has accomplished, in part at least, the desired object.

[illegible]

The present Constitution is not meeting either the present or growing needs of the State. The judiciary provisions are sadly

deficient in supplying the demands of justice; the new counties filling up so rapidly, and justly entitled to representation in the General Assembly, are without a voice, and the meagre salaries paid your State officers will not secure that efficiency and attention the importance of the positions now demand.

The people have expressed their desire for revision and amendment. To gratify these wishes in the most expeditious manner admissible, under the provisions of the existing Constitution, will be meeting an important demand.

COAL AND SALT.

There are no longer doubts in the minds of those who have given intelligent investigation to the subject, as to the presence of saline and bituminous deposits in abundance, within the borders of our State. The general government has placed at our disposal ample means to develop the salt interests, if prudently and judiciously managed. The benefits to the whole State that would result from a development of the coal beds underlying nearly if not the entire surface of the State, cannot be overestimated. Nothing will tend more to bring manufactures among us than cheap fuel. It is within the power of the Legislature to materially aid in utilizing these features of the State's natural resources.

IMMIGRATION.

Railroad companies, possessing vast tracts of our fertile soil, are doing a commendable work in the matter of inducing immigration to our State. The Burlington and Missouri River and the Union Pacific companies have been directing special and successful efforts in foreign countries. These two companies, I am credibly informed, have spent nearly a million of dollars the past year in their foreign operations. The State Agricultural and Horticultural

associations have pursued a policy in their sphere that has resulted beneficially. The State Board of Immigration having exhausted the appropriation, its labors the past year have been limited. Whether the agencies first named are meeting the demands as to efforts in foreign lands, and whether or not we should direct more special efforts to the overcrowded portions of older eastern States, are important matters for you to determine.

The subject of immigration is one that should receive due consideration. Other States have their organizations making known in various ways their respective advantages, and guiding immigrants to favorable localities, where they may find cheap and desirable homes. With our fifty million acres of vacant lands, unsurpassed as to fertility and producing capabilities, Nebraska should not slumber as to her interests in this respect, but see to it that we have at least our share.

U. S. CENTENNIAL EXHIBITION.

Congress has provided for celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of American independence by holding an international exhibition of arts, manufactures and products of the soil and mine, in the city of Philadelphia, in the year 1876. Each State and Territory of the Union will be expected to send its peculiar products, illustrating its resources, both developed and undeveloped, thus affording an opportunity of comparing their industrial conditions and capabilities. The President of the United States has appointed two Commissioners for each State. It will be incumbent upon the respective States themselves to provide means by which they will be properly represented. The undertaking promises to result in the support and sympathy of the American people, and I trust our State will be fully represented. To this end some suitable legislation would be appropriate.

VIENNA EXPOSITION.

In connection with our own I also call your attention to the International Exposition to be held at Vienna in May next. The national government will undoubtedly make such arrangements as that but little expense will be involved in being represented at this exposition. Desiring that the advantages of our young State be known, these valuable opportunities should not be permitted to pass unimproved.

OF THE NEW WEST

I speak from personal observation. Recently it has been my privilege to visit the people quite in detail, with a view to learning their surroundings and necessities. With great earnestness I call your attention to the new settlements on our western border—the rapid extension of civilization in that direction. The people who are making efforts and sacrifices to open and populate that portion of our State look to you with lively interest and great confidence for such legislation as will aid them in their noble work. In considering their wants, not least in the many is the question of continuing the Indians on their present reservations. The class of our citizens to whom I now refer are enduring a multitude of privations incident to the settlement of all new countries, and exhibiting a commendable degree of pioneer enterprise. They should no longer be subjected to the additional and perplexing embarrassments produced by the presence of the nomadic race. In addition, the valuable lands now held by these aborigines should be permitted to pass into the hands of intelligent, enterprising citizens, who would render them productive; and further, they being exclusively the wards of the general government, we having no control over or management of them whatever, should not be subjected to their retarding influences. The remunerable policy

indicated by the government could be more successfully, satisfactorily and expeditiously accomplished by locating them elsewhere, and to themselves.

INDUSTRIAL CLAIMS.

I am informed that there is quite an amount of outstanding evidences of indebtedness of a somewhat floating and doubtful character, which the reputation of the State requires should be investigated, and, if found legitimate and in compliance with the provisions of law in such cases, adjusted or otherwise disposed of.

OFFICIAL REPORTS.

Nothing tends more to want of confidence and consequent general stagnation, than a failure on the part of the people to become possessed of detailed information in relation to the management of their affairs. Confusion in financial matters; failure of the several departments of State to work in harmony; party spirit in opposition to that in power; individual malfeasance, ambition or jealousy, oft repeated and exercised, begets in the minds of the people a fearfulness requiring abatement. This can only be done, and popular distrust prevented, by providing full, regular, detailed and satisfactory reports for the public eye in relation to all officers and public affairs.

BIENNIAL SESSIONS.

In most legislative bodies there is a manifest disposition to defer matters until the last days and hours of the session, and, as a consequence, the people suffer by reason of hasty and inconsiderate legislation. To-day our statute books abound in clerical errors and confusion, produced by want of careful consideration and attention. It is hoped this Legislature may set an example in this respect.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, it will be my greatest pleasure to co-operate with you in matters to which I have referred, and others which your wisdom will doubtless devise. Trusting that no distracting element will interfere with your labors, and that we may each have an assured consciousness of having faithfully discharged duties, both in law making and executive departments, let us ever invoke the aid of Him who guides and governs the acts of individuals, as well as rules the destinies of nations.

ROBERT W. FURNAS.